



# **FIFE COUNCIL PLANNING SERVICES**

## **NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

### **Performance & Improvement Assessment**

#### **Cohort 1**

**June 2024**



<b>FIFE PLANNING SERVICES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PEER REVIEW MEETING</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>7</b>
Attribute 1: This Planning Authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.	7
Attribute 2: The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce	15
Improvement Action Plan (People theme)	17
<b>CULTURE</b>	<b>18</b>
Attribute 3: This Planning Authority Has Embedded Continuous Improvement.	18
Attribute 4: The Planning Authority has Sound Governance	24
Attribute 5: The Planning Authority has Effective Leadership	26
Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)	28
<b>TOOLS</b>	<b>29</b>
Attribute 6: The Planning Authority has a Robust Policy and Evidence Base	29
Attribute 7: The Planning Authority Makes Best use of Data and Digital Technology	32
Attribute 8: The Planning Authority has Effective and Efficient Decision Making Processes	35
Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)	39
<b>ENGAGE</b>	<b>40</b>
Introduction	40
Attribute 9: The Planning Authority has Good Customer Care	42
Attribute 10: The Planning Authority has Effective Engagement and Collaboration with Stakeholders and Communities	46
Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)	49
<b>PLACE</b>	<b>50</b>
Attribute 11: The Planning Authority Supports the Delivery of Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places	50
Attribute 12: The Planning Authority Supports the Delivery of Consented Development	54

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)	57
<b>SUMMARY OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>NPIF BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>60</b>
Case Study: Creating Pathways into the Planning Profession	60
Case Study: Planning Application Timeline Tool	61
Case Study: Working with and Learning from our Customers	65
Case Study: Delivering Sustainable Living and Wellbeing	69

## Fife Planning Services

<b>Planning Authority:</b>	Fife Council
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The Planning Service has used the below matrix when determining what score we have given each attribute.

<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Making excellent progress	Consolidate Share learning with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Making good progress	Build upon Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	Making fair progress	Develop Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Making limited progress	Review Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	No progress	Prioritise Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others

## Introduction

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Fife Planning Services is part of the Council's Place Directorate. One of the larger Planning Services in Scotland; one of the smaller Services in Fife Council.

Fife Planning Services delivers services which are predominantly statutory functions, with limited discretionary work with a focus on facilitating place change through sustainable development, addressing the climate emergency, growing Fife's economy, and strengthening Community Wealth Building across Fife. Over more recent year's statutory planning work has become more complex, challenging delivery within timescales, and requiring ongoing training and development of staff, elected members, and where possible Community Councils.

A multi-disciplinary workforce provides the skills and experience to deliver these functions, as well as innovating and continually improving.

For more than a decade the Planning Authority has published an annual Planning Performance Framework, submitted to Scottish Ministers with feedback provided and 'marked' in terms of green/amber/red. Over that decade Fife Planning Authority has demonstrated continuous improvement. Planning Performance Frameworks have now been replaced by a National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). This is the first report for 2023/24 and is part of a national pilot along with nine other Planning Authorities from across Scotland. Fife Planning Authority has been paired with North Lanarkshire Council through this pilot, which has provided an opportunity to support and learn across Councils.

This report has been prepared through a self-assessment by the Planning Authority, reviewed through a Peer Review group. Externally facilitated through Planning Aid Scotland, the peer group considered the Authority's self-assessment, and focused on areas for improvement. The group was selected by identifying key customers (externally and internally to Fife Council).

Whilst this is a pilot of the national planning improvement framework, the process has assisted Fife Planning Authority in assessing performance, reflecting, listening and considering improvements for further change.

An important aspect of the assessment has been through the Peer Review group, who provided their time with an open and honest approach to the review. I would like to thank those individuals for their contribution.

**Pam Ewen**  
**Head of Planning & Chief Planner**  
**Fife Council**

## Peer Review Meeting

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A peer review meeting took place with key customers involved in the planning system in Fife on 10 June 2024. Customers are both internal and external to the Service and are organisations, services and businesses with whom the Planning Authority engage with. The group consisted of the representatives from the following: -

- Key Agencies Group
- Bellyeoman Community Council & St Andrews Community Council
- Persimmon Homes Scotland
- Montagu Evans
- Homes for Scotland
- Sinclair Watt Architects
- Convenors of West and Central Planning Committee and North East Planning Committee
- Fife Council Protective Services
- Fife Council Customer & Online Services
- North Lanarkshire Council as the Service's peer partner authority

Also in attendance were 3 members of Fife Council Planning Services who were there in an observation capacity but were on hand to answer any specific questions. The National Improvement Champion and National Improvement Officer were also in attendance. The group was facilitated by a representative from Planning Aid Scotland who helped guide the group through the improvement attributes and actions as well as ensuring everyone had an open and honest discussion about actions and any issues.

The purpose of the peer review was to look at the report and to review the scoring of attributes and identified improvement actions. The draft of the Improvement Framework presented to the peer review participants prior to the meeting identified 13 proposed actions and improvements across the Themes set out in the guidance document. Following an introduction and summary of the NPIF process and the approach from the National Improvement Champion; given the range and breadth of the markers and Attributes covered by the Improvement Framework the facilitator agreed in collaboration with the attendant stakeholders the Attributes which the meeting would focus on to ensure the time was used most effectively.

The group agreed the Planning Services actions with some minor amendments as well as identifying additional improvement actions for consideration by the Planning Service. The group worked well together and provided valuable information to use, an example of this is when they asked the Planning Service to prioritise staff training on engaging with customers.

The comments made by the peer review group have been incorporated into the final version of this report and the improvements related to particular Attributes shaped to reflect the outcome of the discussions and feedback received from the peer review group.



**A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.**

## People

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### **Attribute 1: This Planning Authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.**

Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?

- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority received responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

### **Narrative**

Planning Services is comprised of a team of 82 FTE multi-disciplinary staff, 30 of whom are Chartered Town Planners and 8 Licentiates. Over the past decade, the Service has developed its People Plan/Workforce Strategy to better ensure that the Service is more diverse and provides succession planning opportunities. The average age of Planning Services' workforce is approximately 44.

Planning Services' Head of Service (and statutory Chief Planner) is supported by 5 Service Managers each leading a team:

- Policy and Place
- Development Management
- Strategic Development and Infrastructure
- Climate Change and Zero Waste
- Major Business and Customer Service.

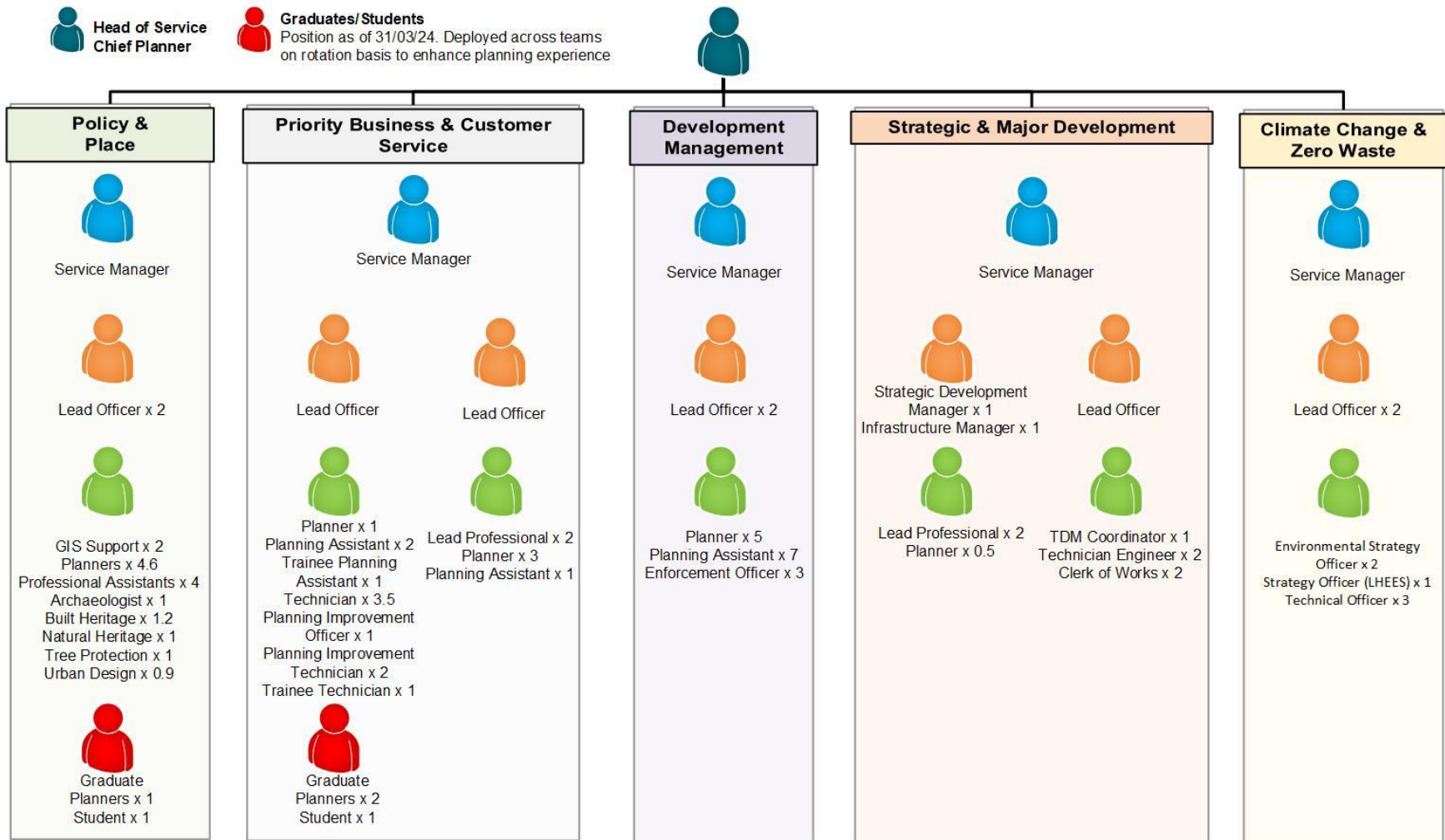
The Service has embedded a hybrid work style and a more flexible way of working, whilst continuing to deliver a good quality of customer service and improved performance. The Service is proud of its culture; being open and honest, supporting each other both in terms of our wellbeing and work, and aligning its values to 'How We Work Matters'.

The Service openly supports staff of different ages, races, gender, and neurodiversity. Through managing recruitment and developing new pathways into planning, in collaboration with University of Dundee and Fife College the Service has been able to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff across the range of specialist areas and services.



# Planning Service Structure

As at: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024



## Planning Services

### Policy & Place

- Placemaking
- Local Development Plan
- Supplementary Guidance
- City Region Spatial Strategy & Regional Housing Partnership
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Habitat Regulation
- Assessment
- Built Heritage
- Archaeology
- Urban Design
- Natural Heritage
- Tree Work / Protection

### Major & Priority Development & Customer Service

- Validate / Register Applications
- Tree Preservation Order Recording
- Enforcement Recording
- Pre-App Enquiries
- Permitted Development Enquiries
- Appeal Admin/Prep
- Issue Decision Notices
- Property History
- Training
- Protocols/Service Level Agreements
- Systems Admin
- Customer Service
- Customer Guides
- Quality Control
- Performance Reporting
- e-Planning / Webpages
- Major Applications
- Affordable Housing
- Prior Application Notices (PANS)
- EIA Screening / Scoping
- Energy & Minerals
- Infrastructure

### Development Management

- Planning Enforcement
- Commencements
- Completions
- Site Monitoring
- Minor/Local Planning Applications
- Advert Applications
- Listed Building Applications
- Conservation Area Consents
- Telecoms
- Other Certificates
- Appeals
- Permitted Development Enquiries
- Pre-App Advice
- Licensing
- Property Enquiries
- Business Critical Applications

### Strategic Development & Infrastructure

- Strategic Development Areas (SDA)
- Major / Strategic Applications
- Strategic Business Critical Applications
- EIA Screening / Scoping
- Local Reviews
- Infrastructure Delivery Program
- SDA Roads Construction Consents
- SDA Planning Applications Consultations
- SDA Related Road Infrastructure Roads Construction Consents
- Planning Application Consultations
- Capital planning

### Climate Change & Zero Waste

- Climate Change
- Sustainable Development
- Zero Waste
- Environmental Strategy
- Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy

### Workforce Information

**RTPI** – The Royal Town Planning Institute is the professional body representing planners in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It promotes and develops policy affecting planning and the built environment.

**Licentiate** - Licentiate membership is for graduates who have completed a fully RTPI accredited qualification. It is the first step towards becoming a Chartered Town Planner via the [Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence](#) (L-APC).

With the broadening remit of Fife Planning Services to include transportation engineers, specialists in climate change and associated disciplines as well as archaeology, built and natural heritage and urban design for example, not all of the people in the service are people in traditional planning officer roles. The Service considers that this is a strength to be built on and developed to provide the flexibility and resilience to meet the policy challenges within the NPF4, the place based development context and the ever-changing dynamics of climate change.

RTPI Qualified Staff	Headcount
Head of Service (Chief Planner)	1
Development Management	21
Development Planning	8
Licentiate	8
Other (Including staff not RTPI eligible)	49

Staff Age Profile	Headcount
Under 30	15
30-39	17
40-49	19
50 and over	36

Length of Service	Headcount
Under 5 years	36
6-15 years	11
16-25 years	21
26 years and over	19

## Budget/Income

The Services statutory and non-statutory income is set out below in respect of the Planning functions of the Service.

Income is monitored monthly against 10-year monthly averages, which allows for budgets to be managed. Budget pressures require to be mitigated relating to new and unfunded duties placed on the Service through the Scottish Government, Local Development Plan preparation, and digital development. These pressures will where possible be mitigated through increasing non-statutory income. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework report (2022/23) identified that there has been a 27% reduction in planning spending in real terms nationally since 2010/11; the highest reduction in Council service areas.

Staffing numbers are regularly reviewed against workloads, project delivery targets and budgets to ensure that adequate capacity and skills are managed across the service. Staffing consists of 95% of the Service budget expenditure.

### Income from Statutory/Non-Statutory Fees

Total Income From	Income 2023/24
Planning Application Fees	£2,343,315.00
Discretionary Application Fees	£138,705.00

## Consultation Response Timescales

With the increasing complexity of work involved across the planning service to address the policy context of NPF4, the delivery of planning whether in determining planning applications or preparing the Local Development Plan there is an ever-greater reliance on specialist advice and input from both internal and external consultees. In recent years this has been particularly acute in relation to consultations from Fife Council's Environmental Health/Public Protection and flooding advice from colleagues in Harbours Flood and Coast. Just as NPF4 broadens the need for technical and specialist inputs into the determination of planning applications and policy development, wider national issues facing recruitment of such specialists into local government are presenting themselves. Difficulties in recruitment into these key services are identified as risks to delivering statutory planning functions within expected timescales. The Service is working with consultees and other bodies to seek to mitigate issues which may arise from delays in consultation responses. Through 2022-24 the level of internal consultations was reduced through agreeing new criteria which trigger such consultations. Concerns regarding the response times to consultations was also raised by participants at the Peer review meeting. There were no changes suggested by the peer review group to the Planning Service's proposed action under this attribute, however the delays to processing applications arising from the increasingly complex process and the reliance on specialist technical input to the determination of applications was noted.

### Average Days for Response to Consultation & Number of Consultation Responses

Consultation Detail	Average Days 2021/22	Average Days 2022/23	Average Days 2023/24
Internal	23	23	29
External	9	8	10

Consultation Detail	Number 2021/22	Number 2022/23	Number 2023/24
Internal	3563	3169	2500
External	1460	1531	1371

## **Access to Advice, Expertise, Evidence and Data**

The Service benefits from having a number of staff with expertise in information management, spatial analysis, and data management. Tools including Geographical Information Systems and Power BI are deployed to develop policy and inform decision making and project development.

The inclusion of staff in both the Policy & Place and Climate Change & Zero Waste Teams provide the Service with specialist expertise in a number of areas. Specifically in relation to NPF4 policy areas related to Climate Change, Biodiversity and the natural environment, and built and historic heritage.

## **Attribute 2: The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce**

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

### **Narrative**

Valuing and supporting the Planning Service's workforce is a key principle and core value of how the service works.

### **Workforce Planning Strategy**

The Service is developing its workplace strategy through continuous reviews of how and what services it delivers to its customers and will be commencing a review to ensure that the Service functions and structure is the right shape to deliver a Place based planning system.

The Service People Plan/Workforce Strategy has created opportunities for a younger workforce, achieved through several routes, in particular the University of Dundee and Fife College. Attracting and retaining talented Planners, environmental and other professionals into local government is increasingly challenging. The Service is successful in attracting and retaining talented staff. Through the recruitment stages the Service is promoted through short videos to convey the values, opportunities and why Fife Council is a great place to work. Planning as a career is also featured in the Council's recruitment webpage.

### **Supporting Staff Development**

The service organises and delivers a wide range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions throughout the year. The CPD series has gained traction over the past 5 years and delivers regular short training sessions on a wide range of topics, and these are open to other Services where relevant. Each team within the Service has an identified training budget. Colleagues are actively encouraged to attend relevant work-related events and provide feedback to colleagues who did not attend. The Service aims for all staff to receive two personal development appraisals each year. Regular 121 and team meetings also take place to ensure open communication. A no blame culture is also fostered so maximum opportunities are gained to reflect on how well services are delivered and to shape future service improvements through reflecting on and learning from issues that arise. More detailed consideration of specific actions

on further training elements particularly on communication skills are addressed under the Engage theme Attribute 9 and 10.

The People Strategy over the past decade has resulted in a more diverse workforce. The Service needs to maintain high rates of retention and continue training and development for all. The Service recognises that there has been more focus on the development of officers in their earlier career years and wants to provide further leadership and management training across the Service management team over the next few years, whilst maintaining regular training opportunities for all.

### **Staff feedback – Service Improvement Actions**

Through the Service's annual development day an update will be provided on the improvement actions both through this assessment as well as the Service's wider improvement plan. All staff will be provided opportunity to discuss the improvements and considering their role in implementing actions.

### **Staff Health and Wellbeing**

Health and Wellbeing are core culture values which are embedded within how officers work. The staff are the Planning Service's main asset, and the Service is committed to having open and supportive discussions with colleagues to grow their knowledge, skills and experience. The Service culture is one where people feel supported. The service's annual staff survey in Sept 2023 showed 90% staff happy at work, and 90% felt supported to develop their skills and knowledge.

Corporately a Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) Survey has recently concluded which is an evolution of the Fife Council corporate 2022 Health Needs Analysis. This will inform the Service of any changing trends, to measure progress against strategies such as 'Our People Matter' (OPM) and to inform Service priorities.



## Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Scoring: (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)

Attribute	Score
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	2
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	2

Based on the grading above, the following areas of improvement have been identified. Their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short – 1 Year/ medium – 3 Years/ long term – 3+ Years).

Improvement Action	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
Attribute 1 - Working corporately to ensure that systems and processes are in place to reduce the impact of recruitment difficulties into specialist services who are critical to determining planning applications.	Planning Services	High	Short-medium	People Time
Attribute 2 - Develop and implement staff skills survey to identify transferable skills to meet aspirations and objectives of place-based agenda (NPF4).	Planning Services	High	Short	People Time Skills



**A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.**

## **Culture**

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### **Attribute 3: This Planning Authority Has Embedded Continuous Improvement.**

- Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

## **Narrative**

The Service has a service improvement programme which is derived from customer and staff feedback, appeal decisions and complaints focusing on improving processes, procedures, and practice. Fife Planning Service has used the previous Planning Performance Framework document to set out the Service improvement objectives for the forthcoming year. As part of those documents which were produced a self-reflective assessment section was included providing commentary and analysis on how the service considers it has performed in the preceding year and also analysing to what extent the service achieved the delivery of the improvement objectives from the previous year. Fife Planning Service marked itself as (1- Excellent Progress) in this attribute as it reflects the overall culture of the service to learn from feedback whether it is good or bad and develop an improvement programme to embed changes to address issues as they arise. It is considered that the specific actions and outcomes to be

delivered are most appropriately set out in the Engage theme as opposed to Attribute 3, as this deals with the process of continuous improvement being embedded in the culture of an organisation as opposed to the specific topics identified as learning coming out of that process. The Peer review meeting participants queried this marker as 1 however the Planning Service does embed continuous improvement as a fundamental business practice. The Service can identify a significant number of previous and ongoing process improvements delivered through this approach; these have been referenced in the previous Planning Performance Frameworks in narrative and case studies and further information on previous customer focussed improvements is provided in the narrative associated with Attribute 9.

## Annual Performance Assessments

Fife Council Planning Services has proactively incorporated rolling improvement actions identified through customer feedback, appeal decisions and learning from complaints as part of the Planning Performance Framework annual reports which were the previous performance monitoring report. The Service Improvement Plan is regularly updated, and actions monitored.

In the last [Planning Performance Framework](#) the service identified the following improvement objectives for 2023/24.

- The service will continue to develop and implement new approaches and processes which reflect the Climate Emergency and also the objectives set out in NPF4 relating to climate change.

**Outcome:- The narrative under Attribute 11 below sets out that the Service has delivered on this objective, while further work continues.**

- Continue to improve productivity and performance to further improve the processing times of planning applications.

**Outcome:-The narrative under Attribute 8 comments on how the Service has performed in relation to the average number of weeks taken to determine planning applications and the delivery of the new Local Development Plan.**

- Collaborate with Fife Council's IT service to create more interactive customer guides on the new mini website. These will include videos and visual demonstrations on how to carry out planning functions online. The Service will also launch a live timeline to provide customers with information on what stage their application has reached during the assessment period.

**Outcome:- The implementation of the customer journey live timeline is reported in Attribute 9 and further detail is provided on this in a Case Study. The Service continues to develop videos to promote job opportunities and will deliver online customer guides as appropriate. The Service has delivered online training to elected members as well as through our comprehensive CPD programme.**

- Maintain the service's commitment to meeting with key stakeholders including community groups and professional agents to both obtain feedback on current processes as well as feedback on changes implemented.

**Outcome:- The Service continues to proactively engage with stakeholders and customers and reports in Attribute 9 below that the Service continues to develop its customer survey to obtain feedback on the experience of those involved in the planning application process: in 2023/24 the survey was extended to those customers who had submitted representations to planning applications.**

- Review, adapt and develop the service's approaches to embed the changes arising from NPF4 and consider how best to align its resources to meet the challenges arising therefrom.

**Outcome:- The narrative across the Attributes below indicate the variety of projects and initiatives which have been delivered in the reporting period to address the policy context within NPF4. The need for a staff skills survey has been identified as an improvement action for the forthcoming reporting period 2024/25.**

The Planning Service's Improvement Plan identifies specific actions to address these objectives.

## **Awards and Performance Accreditation Frameworks**

Fife Council Planning Services submits applications based on its projects and innovative business improvements for consideration by national and other bodies. A review of activities is considered each year to identify potential candidate submissions. The list below is an example of the submissions and awards in the last couple of years.

- RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence 2023
- Finalist Planning Authority of the Year
- Young Scottish Planner of the Year – Sarah Purves
- Scottish Planning Innovation Award – Winner under Peoples Category – Creating Pathways into Planning. This was for the Service's approach to workforce development.
- Climate Change – Climate literacy (the Service has achieved Climate Literacy Gold certification, and Fife Council bronze)

The Service is committed to tackling the impacts of climate change. Planning Services became the first Scottish local authority service to achieve gold Carbon Literate Organisation status. Having a carbon literate workforce informs staff thinking, and ensures they are equipped to facilitate the transition to net zero. A Service Climate Action Plan was agreed in 2022.

## **Improvement Activities**

Fife Council Planning Services undertakes a wide range of benchmarking and collaborative work with other council's and national bodies such as Heads of Planning Scotland. The Service regularly feeds into consultations on new legislation published by the Scottish Government and participates in workshops.

The Service's improvement plan is a collation of all the activities that require to be improved arising from customer feedback, appeal decisions, staff suggestions, complaint and SPSO decisions, for example. Additional improvements have been identified within this report, arising from the assessment, and will be incorporated into a comprehensive service improvement plan. This can identify those actions which have arisen through this report.

The case studies in previous years' Planning Performance Framework documents have regularly demonstrated the diverse range of activities the Planning Service is involved in. Examples of activities undertaken are set out below:

- Benchmarking with evidence report with LPA and Architecture & Design Scotland
- Adaptation Scotland

- Planning Aid Scotland Development Day
- Annual House Builders Forum and regular investor liaison.
- Meet with industry bodies, Homes for Scotland and the Scottish Property Federation
- Agents Forum
- Internships with local house builders
- The Service also coordinated and delivers an extensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme – external and internal speakers are invited to present both to Planning Services colleagues but also more widely across the Directorate and other relevant services on current relevant topics.

## Complaints

Fife Council's escalation resolution team is a central corporate complaints team that receives, manages and allocates corporate complaints to the various services within Fife Council. The Planning Services Improvement Team has an additional process in place to monitor, manage and record any corrective actions from upheld complaints or consider suggestions from customers on behalf of the service. These actions are then monitored through a data management system ("Power BI") dashboard. To ensure complaints are responded to consistently and within the agreed timescales, templates and appointments are used. The officer allocated to respond to the complaint is automatically sent appointments into their work calendar to assist scheduling and meeting corporate response timescales.

The Service's internal complaint handling process has a formal structure with officer's responding to the complaint feeding back the outcome of investigations to individual case officers and where required more widely to the service and identifying improvement actions to be implemented. A similar process exists for Local Review Body decisions which may identify processing or issues with the handling of an application. The customer surveys issued to those involved in the planning application process also enable the Service to identify whether it is meeting customer expectations and assist to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

**Complaints Received 2023/24: 70**

**Complaints Upheld/Partially Upheld 2023/24: 19**

**Most Common Complaint Category:** Dissatisfaction with policy/Delivery arrangements.

The Planning Service's improvement agenda is based on all feedback which is received, and learning from complaints is embedded into the Service's approach to identifying improvements to customer service. The feedback received also enables the Service to shape and adapt internal processes which also ultimately work towards improving the experience of the customers.

**Complaints referred to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman: 10 (9 Withdrawn, 1 Not Upheld)**

The service has had no complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), data shows that of the 10 complaints that went to the SPSO only 10% were taken forward with a not upheld outcome with the other 90% being withdrawn.

Withdrawn typically means that the SPSO decision was that these complaints were either, out of their jurisdiction, the complainants' outcome is unachievable or that in the opinion of the SPSO they can add nothing further to the decision already reached.

How the Service engages effectively with customers was raised in discussions during the Peer Review meeting and it was suggested that the Planning Service look to deliver additional training to upskill staff on how they deal with customers and meet their expectations in terms of service delivery across the wide variety of people and groups that the service engages with. The details of what the Service will do are set out in the Engage theme in Attribute 9. In addition to the improvement actions derived from the Peer Review process and this first National Improvement Framework, Fife Planning Service has an extensive improvement programme directly derived from customer feedback received through a range of different surveys. The Service sets out further detail on this aspect under the narrative related to Attribute 9.

## **Attribute 4: The Planning Authority has Sound Governance**

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there is evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than x % of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

### **Scheme of Delegation**

Fife Council's List of Officer Powers (LoOP) sets out the levels of delegation of decision making for the service. Fife Council Planning Services considers there is an appropriate balance to ensure that significant applications are determined at the appropriate level. The Loop and Committee Powers are reviewed Corporately on a regular basis and the Planning Service proactively engages with this process to ensure that the scheme of delegation is operating effectively and efficiently. Where the scheme of delegation is amended this requires approval from the Scottish Government. The service is currently awaiting that approval.

[Fife Council Governance Documentation Webpage](#)

[List of Officer Powers](#)

### **Councillor Training**

Training opportunities and CPD sessions are made available to elected members who sit on the various planning committees. With the introduction of the mandatory training for elected members the planning service is shaping its approach as to how we will deliver this to all elected members. Given that certain decisions require referral to full council it is to be delivered to all elected members but tailored to the appropriate level for the types of decisions required to be made.



The topics covered in the Planning Service's training schedule so far have been:

- Appeals and Local Reviews
- Material Considerations
- Enforcement
- Application Types and Permitted Development
- Planning Conditions and Obligations
- Sunlight and Daylight
- Local Place plans and their relationship with Local Development Plans
- Development Plans and Community Planning
- Feedback from customers to help us improve
- Economy Planning Circular
- Flooding and Planning
- Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy
- Local Development Plans

The Service is exploring the use of mandatory eLearning modules in 2024/25

### **Overtured Recommendations (Committee or Local Review)**

There is no pattern or frequency of the number of applications overtured at committee which would give rise to concern that there is a gap or deficiency in policy or guidance. All planning committees are led by an experienced senior officer and a solicitor from legal services to ensure that decision making is based on the appropriate planning context and policy framework.

#### **Application Overtured**

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Overtured at Committee	38%	33%	55%
Overtured at Local Review	37%	42%	50%

## Attribute 5: The Planning Authority has Effective Leadership

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

### Narrative

In May 2024 the Council formally approved the Head of Planning Services to undertake the duties of Chief Planning Officer. The Chief Planner, a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, works with the Council's senior management team to inform Place change and strategy. Examples include assisting with the review and preparation of the Council's Local Outcome Improvement Plan (the [Plan4Fife](#)), the Council's Capital Plan, and delivering workshops on Local Development Plan, strategic development growth, and addressing climate change. The Council has declared both a Climate and a Housing emergency, with the Chief Planner having a key role in both of the associated Boards.

The Chief Planner is a past Chair of RTPI (Scotland), and Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) with ongoing active involvement at city region and national levels with public and private sector organisations. The Chief Planner is currently representing HoPS nationally on the Planning Infrastructure Place Advisory Group.

Systematic Service Improvement is the backbone of Planning Services. The Services Improvement Plan pulls from customer feedback, staff, appeal decisions etc. to comprehensively drive improvement. The Service has invested resources in creating a team to drive forward our Service Improvement Plan. The Service's Management Team meet regularly to consider performance, resources, and improvements, along with a wider Leadership Team. Leaders within the Service demonstrate and encourage continuous improvement.

The Planning Service surveys its customers, including applicants/agents on their journey through the planning application process as well as anyone who has made a representation on an application. This is valuable feedback and informs learning and actions to drive forward improvements. Any improvements actions are also communicated back to the customer and staff are made aware of any actions through the regular Service newsletter.

### **FOI, Complaints, Compliments**

<b>Detail</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
Information Requests	197	83	86
No. of Complaints	70	38	78
No. of Compliments	70	73	100

### **Compliments**

Planning Services received 70 compliments from customers through Fife Council's corporate feedback process in financial year 2023/24. This number has slightly decreased from last year which could indicate that staff are not passing them onto the corporate team to be logged.

## Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

(1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)

Attribute	Score
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	1
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	2
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	2

Based on the grading above, the following areas of improvement have been identified. Their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short – 1 Year/ medium – 3 Years/ long term – 3+ Years).

Improvement Action	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
Attribute 3: Review and prioritise the actions identified in Planning Services' existing Service Improvement Plan.	Planning Services	High	Short	Service Managers/Improvement Team
Attribute 4: Developing a suite of e-learning modules for local elected members.	Planning Services	High	Short	Improvement Team Digital Skills Team

The Peer Review group agreed with the broad objectives set in the Improvement Actions proposed in relation to Attributes 3 and 4. As noted above more detailed discussion relating to Attribute 3 focussed on specific outcomes principally the need to deliver additional training and increasing opportunities for Planning Services staff dealing with customers, telephone and meetings with them and considering how best to bolster confidence of staff particularly handling difficult or challenging conversations. While Fife Planning Services are content that continuous improvement is embedded as normal business practice the actions derived from the learning from this process in relation to how the Service works better with customers are best captured within Attribute 9.



**A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.**

## **Tools**

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### **Attribute 6: The Planning Authority has a Robust Policy and Evidence Base**

- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Local Development Plan in place and/ or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/ or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/ or on track for approval?
- Has the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

## Local Development Plan (FIFEplan)

The adopted FIFEplan Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in 2017 and is over five years old. Work has started on a replacement LDP with a timescale for adoption by 2027 as shown in Development Plan Scheme (DPS) 13 (2023):

Stage	Expected Date DPS13 (2013)	Change from DPS12 (2022)
Evidence report and gate check	1Q 2024/25   (April 2024) [Was March]	+ 1 Month
Proposed LDP2 and consultation	4Q 2025/26   (January 2026) [Was September]	+ 4 Months
Submit Proposed Plan to Scottish Ministers	1Q 2026/27   (June 2026) [Was March]	+ 3 Months
Adoption	2Q 2027/28   (September 2027) [Was March]	+ 6 Months

The [Evidence report](#) Stage is on track as shown in DPS13.

## Regional Spatial Strategy

There is an interim Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in place. The full RSS will be prepared once regulations are enacted and guidance published. Section 5 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is partially in force, in for the purpose of issuing, varying, publishing, and revoking guidance under 1997 c.8 s.4ZE; it is not yet in force otherwise.

## Local Development Plan Evidence Report

The Service wants to ensure that the [Local Development Plan 2](#), currently being developed, is the Council's corporate place strategy reflecting the Plan4Fife and providing a spatial strategy across the 7 local areas in Fife. A Plan which gains ownership across the Council's Leadership team and across political parties. The first stage, the [Evidence Report](#) was approved by Fife Council on 21 March 2024 for submission to the Gate Check. Preparation involved dialogue with DPEA to explain the approach being taken and information required, including administration arrangement. After an initial draft submission to allow the DPEA to ensure all the administrative requirements had been met, the Evidence Report was formally submitted to the Gate

Check the week beginning 29th April 2024; the first Evidence Report to be submitted nationally.

## **Local Development Plans Policies**

The LDP2 Evidence Report includes a review of FIFEplan, including assessments include a review of planning appeal decisions from 2018 (allowing for the policy to flow through to appeal decisions) to mid-2023. The policy review assessment shows that planning appeal decisions indicate where the policies have been material in decisions. It is not possible to rest on individual decisions without a detailed analysis of each – for example, the nature of the decision can range from a disagreement with the policy as written (less likely given the policies were subject to examination) to a difference in interpretation or giving greater material weight to the other benefits of the policy in each case by a Reporter. The introduction of NPF4 as part of the development plan limits the value of a more detailed analysis.

## Attribute 7: The Planning Authority Makes Best use of Data and Digital Technology

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media and other platforms?

### e-Development Portal

The Planning Service was an early adopter of the principle of moving the submission of applications online and has continued to promote submission of applications and supporting documents through the case management portal. As noted in the accompanying statistics 97% of applications were submitted online in 2023/24.

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Online Submissions	97%	97%	97%
Paper Submissions	3%	3%	3%

The Planning Service has an administrative charge in place to assist with the related administrative costs of digitising the submission and uploading to the e-Development portal. The online portal is promoted through our standard responses and mini website.

### Data Governance

The Service gathers a large evidence base for the evidence report from a wide range of Council Services, Key Agencies, utility providers, pressure groups, industry bodies etc. utilising the latest data available at the time of preparing the evidence report. Where any data gaps were identified, actions are in place to address through the preparation of the Proposed Plan.

The Service has a file retention schedule previously used for paper documents, the service is currently looking into implementing an electronic retention schedule and will use the new Uniform Data Management Tool (UDMT) to setup automatic file retention rules. This will ensure that data that the Service holds from application submissions is held in compliance with legislative requirements.



## Interactive Web Mapping, GIS and Spatial Data

Much of the data the Planning Service holds is spatial data. All planning constraints are digitised, and development management officers have the ability to interrogate the mapping. Constraints for individual planning applications are also automatically pulled through to uniform.

[LDP interactive mapping](#) is available for all officers and the public to access.

As the Fife [Evidence Report](#) is place based, its preparation heavily relied on the spatial analysis of many data sets.

Across the Council it is recognised that improvements are required in how data, information, and intelligence is used. Evidence-based decision making, both at a strategic and operational level, requires good quality, relevant and timely information. It also requires the use of appropriate tools for information analysis, training to use them and wider support, co-ordination, and collaboration across Services in the Council to implement change. For Planning Services and placemaking, moving from data management to deriving intelligence from information is key to both improving services and changing how the Service works. To accomplish this, the aim is to identify and upskill the workforce in the use of GIS analysis and data management.

Fife Planning Services has identified that undertaking a staff skills survey is an important action to capture the transferable skills base which can be used to assist in delivering the place-based planning focus and the new approaches and technical aspects presented within NPF4. Having this knowledge will assist in identifying participants in project teams and working more collaboratively within the service.

## Digital Technology

To drive greater productivity, increase automation, and improve customer experiences further the Service needs to be more digitally enabled. Maximising the use of Power BI will continue and will require further support from Fife Council corporate IT colleagues. Exploring the potential for AI, further developing automation where possible, and continuously improving the digital customer experience. The Scottish Government launched their Planning Digital Programme in 2020. Initially expressed as a world class digital planning system being the goal, the programme has now been stalled. This has impacted on digital innovation within the Service. The Service needs to consider how systems could be moved to cloud based. This work will be a focus in year 1 to identify the requirements; and in years 2 and 3 to identify how and when this can be implemented. Nationally consideration requires to be given to maximising digital solutions, reducing/removing legislative requirements e.g. paper copies of documents, newspaper advertising of applications.

The Peer Review group feedback identified that improvements should be made to the eplanning system nationally, and learning from the system in England could assist. Whilst this is not a Fife Council improvement, it is highlighted to assist on improvements nationally through the Scottish Government.

## **Examples of Digital Technology Used by the Planning Service**

### **Microsoft Teams**

Meetings/Delivering Training using hybrid approaches

### **Power BI**

Report dashboard software (weekly list, planning timeline and various reports)

### **Power Automate**

Used to automate repetitive tasks (used in our complaints process, weekly list and self-build housing list)

### **Microsoft Forms**

Used to gather feedback from customers, used for online engagement for evidence report and in our self-build housing list

**X** (Formally Twitter) Planning Services account

### **Uniform Enterprise**

Used to automate email updates to customers

### **Planning Contact Us forms**

Now capturing new data on customer contact through Power BI and Power Automate.

## **Attribute 8: The Planning Authority has Effective and Efficient Decision Making Processes**

- Does the planning authority have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- Are less than x% of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

### **Narrative**

#### **Utilising resourcing efficiently within timescales.**

With the increased complexity involved in assessing applications, as well as the new Local Development Plan process, planning applications and policy work is taking longer.

The Service constantly reviews workloads and capacity across the service and looks to ensure that resources are deployed to meet workload pressures where these arise in different teams. As reported elsewhere the Service skills review will further assist to determine the best fit for skills across the service particularly as the Service looks to meet the challenges presented by climate change and place-based planning.

The performance of the Planning Service in many aspects of the work it delivers relies on the timescales being met by consultees external to the service. In particular this has caused delays where there have been shortages and difficulties recruiting into the Council, i.e. Protective Services and Harbours, Flooding and Coast. This also is relevant to external consultees, in particular delays are experienced receiving consultation responses from Health & Safety Executive.

### **Decision Making**

In terms of the average number of weeks taken to determine planning applications Fife Council Planning Services is meeting the timescales it set itself within PPF 12. The service is also meeting the development plan timescales, in so far as they are within the control of the planning service. Most work, both planning applications and specific projects are managed through project planning tools.

### Validation Timescales and Validation Rate (Average Working Days)

46% of applications in 2023/24 were valid on receipt.

Application Type	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	2.33	7.50	2.33
Householder	3.37	3.61	5.48
Local Non-Householder	4.30	4.88	5.38
Major	4.96	3.60	4.91
Others	3.71	4.30	6.28

### Processing Times (Not Including Planning Processing Agreements (PPAs)/Extension of Time (Eot))

Timescales	No. of Apps (Inc. PPA or EoT) 2023/24	No. of Apps 2023/24	Processing Time (Weeks) 2023/24	Processing Time (Weeks) 2022/23	Processing Time (Weeks) 2021/22
Major Developments	19	8	27.4	16.6	34.1
Local Developments – Non Householder	628	344	10.9	14.8	15.7
Householder Developments	807	592	8.0	9.6	11.0
Major – Housing	6	2	57.1	16.3	55.4
Local – Housing	154	65	13.9	21.2	18.7
Major – Business and Industry	2	1	11.1	-	18.2

<b>Timescales</b>	<b>No. of Apps (Inc. PPA or EoT) 2023/24</b>	<b>No. of Apps 2023/24</b>	<b>Processing Time (Weeks) 2023/24</b>	<b>Processing Time (Weeks) 2022/23</b>	<b>Processing Time (Weeks) 2021/22</b>
Local – Business and Industry	103	54	10.2	16.5	16.9
EIA	5	-	-	17.4	85.1
Local Legal Agreements	7	1	68.3	50.0	38.2
Major Legal Agreements	10	3	48.7	-	179.1
Others	609	457	6.3	7.8	8.1

## Approval Rates

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Decisions Approved	96.2%	95.0%	97.0%
Decisions Refused	3.8%	5.0%	3.0%

## Local Review and Appeals

In terms of the number of planning application decisions made contrary to the officer's recommendation at either Local Review Body (LRB) or Committee there is no evidence of any policy deficiency arising from the decisions taken by LRB, Department of Planning & Environmental Appeals (DPEA) Reporters or judicial review. Outcomes from LRBs and Appeals are circulated to officers for awareness. Any key issues arising from the Report of Handling or in the processing of a particular case highlighted or commented on by Reporters or the LRB Officer are fed back to the case officer.

## Decisions Overturned at Appeal or Review

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Local Reviews	7 (37%)	5 (42%)	4 (50%)
Appeals to Scottish Government (DPEA)	5 (33%)	8 (38%)	11 (55%)

## Enforcement Charter/Cases

The Enforcement Charter was reviewed and updated in February 2024. Enforcement cases are managed by 3 enforcement officers. Each enforcement officer works within a specific geographic area of Fife. Workload can be moved if required to manage caseloads. The Enforcement Charter can be viewed on the [Unauthorised Building Work webpage](#) under the related publications.

## Enforcement Statistics

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Enforcement Cases Received	517	424	506
Breaches Resolved (Not De Minimis, Duplication, Established Use or No Breach)	223	207	192
Enforcement Notices Served	8	8	2
Application Derived from Enforcement	60	52	34
Cases Closed	509	502	578

## Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)

(Scoring: 1 - Making excellent progress, 5 - No progress)

Attribute	Score
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	3
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision-making processes	2

Based on the grading above, the following areas of improvement have been identified. Their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short – 1 Year/ medium – 3 Years/ long term – 3+ Years).

Improvement Action	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
Attribute 7: Developing spatial analysis further to inform decision making	Planning Services	Medium	Medium	GIS Support
Attribute 7: Training for staff on the use of GIS	Planning Services	Medium	Medium	Staff Development
Attribute 7: Horizon scanning of digital solutions which could enhance delivery of the planning service.	Planning Services	Medium	Ongoing	Service development

The Peer Review agreed the assessment and scoring set out in the report. No further changes were suggested to the improvements under Attribute 7 as set out above.



**A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.**

## Engage

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### Introduction

This Theme sets out how Planning Services interacts, with and learns from all those that the Service deals with as part of its day-to-day business. Some are clearly defined in terms of the development management process ranging from neighbours and communities where development is proposed or taking place, to the developers and agents who submit applications and consultees with whom the Service works to assist. The scope of Attribute 9 also relates to how the Service communicates and engages with customers involved in and contributing to the Development Plan process, the increasingly critical work delivered by the Service's Climate Change and Zero Waste team. Attribute 10 focusses on how the service communicates and engages with different stakeholders across all aspects of the work delivered by Planning Services. For many years as set out in previous Planning Performance Framework reports the Service has derived previous and ongoing improvement actions from its customer survey work across all the participants in the planning process. Set out below are previous Improvement Actions which the Service has delivered in the last 12-18 months. The current improvement action programme, set out below is derived from ongoing customer survey work and specifically focuses on improving the experience and quality of service which the Planning Service provides to its customers.



<b>Improvement Actions Identified Through Customer Feedback which have already been delivered,</b>
Publish new weekly update of applications online
Set up new email list for weekly updates to community councils
Improved monitoring of enforcement cases and communication with customers
Electronic Contact Us forms set up online to allow customers to request direct communication with Planning
Customer and Contributor Surveys sent to applicants/agents and members of the public who comment on applications for feedback on our service
Installation of upgraded Public Access system
Introduction of real-time application workload monitoring
Publish Timeline Tool for customers to track applications
Automatic emails setup for applicants/agents when applications received
Agent's Forum to discuss issues/improvements with architects/planning consultants
Opening of telephone lines and reintroduction of telephone appointments for customers

<b>Future Improvement Actions Derived From Customer Feedback</b>
Planning Obligation Project to streamline and update existing process for Planning Legal Agreements
Reduction of invalid applications processed
New guidance and videos to help customers with planning process
Analysis of pre-application process to improve service and average time taken
Overview of current appeal and Local Review process
Introduction of new process for Stopping Up Orders
Review of High Hedge process
Introduction of electronic retention to clear historic data from systems
Automatic emails to advise applicants/agents of stages within planning process

The Improvement Action referenced under Attribute 3 which focusses on embedded continuous improvement identifies that we will review and prioritise the delivery of these specific customer experience process improvements.

## Attribute 9: The Planning Authority has Good Customer Care

### Narrative

Customer care within the Planning system is an essential aspect that contributes to its effectiveness and overall success. Fife Council's Planning service adheres to the Council's [Our People Matter](#) (OPM) framework which places an emphasis on Focusing on Customers; placing them at the centre of its operations. Planning Services regularly hosts engagement events to provide developers and agents opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, and to assist the Service in identifying specific improvement actions. The Service provides feedback on the progress of delivering the actions back to the participants of these events. The Service has received compliments from participants on the tangible results achieved and the open and honest dialogue at such events. The Service actively seeks feedback through the online customer survey to help assess customer satisfaction, identify areas for improvement and enhance the overall service provided.

### Pre-Application Service

The Service offers a pre-application service, allowing developers and applicants to seek advice before submitting a formal Planning application, this service helps to streamline the process, reduce delays, and ensures that applicants receive accurate guidance early in the Planning process.

The Service has published guidance on the [pre-applications](#) that provides clear guidelines on what information is required, the cost, how customers can request pre-app advice and information on what will be provided through the service. This guidance is detailed throughout the website and is communicated to customers through standard responses used by the contact service.

To simplify and ensure that the correct information is being submitted to us the Service has created an online form through the mini website allowing customers to upload documents and make their payment during the submission process.

### Pre-Application Service Stats

The number of applications submitted in 2023/24 subject to a Pre-application is shown below. While this indicates a small percentage in the number of applications that are being submitted after pre-app advice, it does not factor in pre-applications where the view is taken that the proposal would not be supported or that applications can take multiple years to be submitted after pre-application advice has been given.

Detail	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Pre-applications validated	212	222	323
Applications subject to pre-application advice	4.5% (81)	5% (134)	11% (149)

## **Developer/Community Engagement**

The Planning service regularly engages with developers and communities alike. Engagement with potential investors is done through the annual Fife House Builders Forum which recently had over 70 attendees, Homes for Scotland, the Scottish Property Federation, and individual meetings.

Overall, the Service does not formalise engagement across all activities in a communications strategy. Rather, engagement is taken forward from the Council's engagement strategy and aligned to particular projects/activities, such as the Local Development Plan and Climate Strategy.

## **Events 2023/24**

A range of events were held including:

- Meetings with community groups to assist in the delivery of local place plans
- Fife House Builders Forum
- Consultants' forum
- Agents' forum
- Homes for Scotland
- Scottish Property Federation
- Individual Investor Meetings

The Service has provided training to Community Council groups to improve their understanding of the planning system and have provided them with resources to assist them. This has been delivered via a hybrid training session in May 2023 and two online sessions in January and February 2024. With [interactive training presentations](#) being provided on [Fife Council's Community Council hub](#) covering the following topics:

- [Planning Applications](#)
- [Planning Policy](#)
- [Planning FAQ](#) (based on questions asked at the sessions)

Each of these training sessions have seen a good level of engagement but with only a small number of Community Councils attending. The Service will be more proactive and encourage Community Council members to attend future sessions. Feedback from the sessions in May 2024 was positive; attendees found that the event was informative and interesting and at the right level for their understanding.

## **Customer Survey Results**

Every year the Service actively seeks customer feedback, primarily through the online customer survey. An invite to complete this survey is issued to the applicant or agent shortly after the determination of an application.

From the 1st of April 2023 to the 31st of March 2024 the Development Management team issued 2606 invitations to customers, encouraging them to take part in the online survey. The survey includes 13 questions, encompassing a variety of formats including open-ended, multiple-choice, and equality monitoring queries.

This year's feedback is fully detailed in the best practices case study 'Working with and learning from our customers'. The data shows that customers are satisfied overall but have highlighted some recurring themes.

How Planning Services engages with its customers was a major theme and topic of discussion at the Peer Review Meeting. As an outcome of these discussions the Peer Review Meeting suggested that the Service add an additional Improvement Action focussing on training of staff in communicating effectively with customers. The Planning Service agrees with this recommendation and has added a further Improvement Action to be delivered under Attribute 9. The details of what this improvement action will encompass will be set out in further detail at the project planning stage. In line with established practice feedback will be provided on progress and how the Service delivers this objective.

## **Contributor Survey**

During 2023/24 Planning Services introduced a contributor survey and have asked for feedback from customers (Customers commenting on Planning Applications) through the Service's online survey, which is sent once an application has been determined. During the period 1st of April 2023 to the 31st of March 2024 Planning Improvement Team issued 1831 invitations to customers inviting them to complete the online survey.

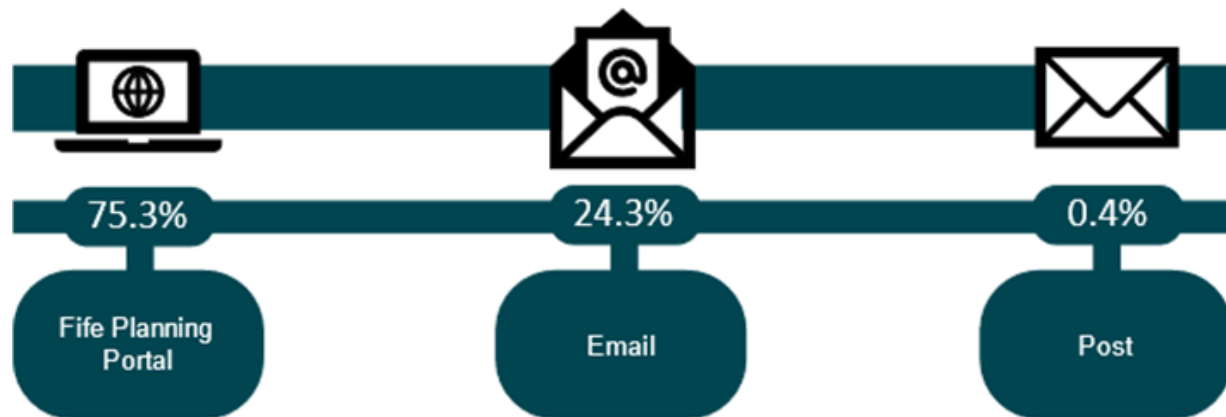
This feedback allows Planning Services to look at key areas for improvement in relation to Development Management and to analyse whether customers are satisfied that their comments are considered during the application assessment process.

Initial feedback seems to indicate that where applications are approved, customers feel that their objections have not been considered fully.

## **Actions**

- As this is a new survey the Service will be able to compare results in the next financial year when there is comparable data.

## Contributor Engagement Methods



## Stats from Contributor Survey

How satisfied were you with communication received from Planning

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
16%	11%	11%	17%	46%

How satisfied are you that your comments were considered

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
17%	16%	24%	17%	27%

## **Attribute 10: The Planning Authority has Effective Engagement and Collaboration with Stakeholders and Communities**

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travellers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

### **Narrative**

The Planning Service proactively engages with its customers and stakeholders. The Service hosts an annual Housebuilders Forum to maintain effective communication and dialogue with the housebuilding industry investors in Fife. In addition, two meetings a year are held with the most active agents submitting applications in Fife to discuss developments within planning legislation and how this may affect their business, as well as obtaining feedback as to the service being delivered to them. In addition, customer surveys which are issued with planning application decisions provide key reflection on the quality of the service being provided. Feedback from engagement and survey results assist to shape and prioritise the Planning Service's improvement strategy for the forthcoming year.

The demand for services is driven by statutory requirements, and in respect of planning applications can fluctuate and be impacted by the wider economic climate. The Service takes time to engage with businesses and investors to encourage investment into Fife, playing an important role in growing Fife's economy. Facilitating the delivery of new homes across Fife to meet local needs and address the Housing Emergency, along with associated infrastructure, and meeting the challenge presented by climate change are two of the key drivers for the service.

## Community Engagement Strategy

The Local Development Plan Participation Statement was published as part of [Development Plan Scheme 2023 \(Thirteenth Edition\)](#) which is a summary of when and how the Council proposes to engage the public on the production, adoption, and implementation of the Development Plan. The Participation Statement also considers who is to be included, how the Service will consult, and the steps required to involve the public in the process.

Communities & Neighbourhood Services has used the Place Standard tool to gauge public opinion of their local environment and services. The results have been used to inform the Local Development Plan Evidence Report rather than conduct a similar exercise with the same communities. The opinion of the public at large was canvassed on specific themes and the feedback on those surveys was published in November 2023 with invitations to comment on perceived gaps and changes before the Evidence Report was published.

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) requires the Council as planning authority to see and have regard to the views of:

- Children and young people
- Disabled people
- Gypsies and travellers

Engagement with children and young people took place through consultation work, online survey for children living in Fife, and workshops in several Fife primary schools.

Play Sufficiency Assessment engagement and consultation work with under 18s (in person group sessions and online survey) Youth Parliament were contacted as part of the Fife Council and Planning Aid Scotland Youth Engagement project. The Living Well Locally children's survey and consultation work in various Fife primary schools.

Fife Centre for Equalities supported consultation and engagement with disabled people and groups.

PAS was engaged to speak with Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Show persons. Individuals, families, and wider groups were consulted to identify accommodation and service needs, aspirations and land use issues including access to temporary and permanent sites.

Fife Council has a [community engagement toolkit](#) which can be used to run community engagement which applies best practice.

The Evidence Report's [Annex 4](#) summarises the engagement activity.

The Council supports community bodies to prepare [Local Place Plans \(LPPs\)](#) where resources allow. This has included the printing of large format mapping. There is a dedicated email address for enquiries and information, and a website with information and guides was set up in May 2022 when the invitation to prepare LPPs was issued. The website includes a toolkit and supporting information on preparing LPPs. Planning Aid Scotland has been engaged to provide capacity building for community bodies, with additional assistance provided from the Council's Climate Change and Zero Waste team. Fife Planning Services has continued to run a fortnightly Learning Cohort Group for community groups beyond the Planning Aid Scotland capacity building programme to assist local communities and groups to deliver community place plans.

The Council recognised the challenges faced by many community organisations in preparing LPPs and so the submission deadline of January 2024, was extended to 30 June 2024. The LPP validation procedures are being developed with input from Legal Services and a register will follow.

Place change proposals within LPP's will be considered in preparing the Proposed Plan (LDP). Working across Council services, particularly Community Services proposals will be considered, engaging with the community groups who submit LPP's and aligning with the wider local community planning agenda. The Council is currently considering a corporate tool for community engagement, and it is intending to utilise this through the LDP process.

The Service plays a lead role in climate strategy both locally and regionally, this includes leading on the development of Climate Ready South East Scotland, a partnership programme to better understand how climate change will affect the region, the key risks and opportunities faced, and where more action and collaboration is needed.

The Service manages the Fife Environmental Partnership, a network of public sector organisations which co-ordinate environmental action. And at a local level, the Service is a key partner in [Climate Action Fife](#), an ambitious five-year programme of climate action supporting collaborative public and voluntary sectors and community organisations to work together to tackle the key areas of greenhouse gas emissions, including energy and heat, food and transport.



## Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

(1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)

Attribute	Score
9. This planning authority has good customer care	2
10 The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2

Based on the grading above, the following areas of improvement have been identified. Their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short – 1 Year/ medium – 3 Years/ long term – 3+ Years).

Improvement Action	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
Attribute 9 - Continue to develop the Planning Services' website to include more simplified guidance including video and visual demonstrations to help with reduction in invalid submissions.	Planning Improvement Team	High	Short	Improvement Team
Attribute 9 - New invalid process being scoped out through process improvement event (LEAN) with agents to improve validation rates.	Planning Service	High	Short	Improvement Team Agents forum
Attribute 9 - Continue to develop and improve upon the Planning timeline tool.	Planning Improvement Team	Medium	Medium	Improvement Team Customer feedback
Attribute 9 - Further develop Planning Services' customer survey to include selectable key areas (themes) where customers feel their experience fell short.	Planning Improvement Team	Medium	Short	Improvement Team
Attribute 9 – Training programme to be developed to improve on how staff communicate more effectively with customers.	Planning Improvement Team	High	Short	Improvement Team/HR/ possible external resource



**A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: Sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; Liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and Productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.**

## **Place**

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### **Attribute 11: The Planning Authority Supports the Delivery of Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places**

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#), the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places and is implementing them?

## Supporting Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places

Fife Council has prepared its Evidence Report for the new Local Development Plan (LDP). The Evidence Report has been written to present the evidence base and issues as a 'story of Fife's places'; its place-based structure complements the Council's people and places operating model and will help to better align the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Plan4Fife, when it is reviewed so the local development plan represents the spatial and land use aspects of Plan4Fife.

In collating the Evidence Report, discussions have been held with the Council's Community Managers representing Fife's seven localities. NHS Fife and Public Health Scotland representatives have also been contacted to identify planning issues and source evidence to inform the new LDP as well as to harness support for the preparation of LDP2 and raise awareness of its purpose and the role partners can play in informing the evidence base and policies that will follow. ScotPHO's profiling tool is the main source of health data at Fife area (locality) and localities level (intermediate zone).

Mitigating the impacts of climate change and adapting Fife's places is one of the biggest challenges facing the Council and Fife's communities. As the strategic lead for addressing the climate emergency we want to ensure that addressing climate change is embedded in all Service's thinking and the Council's decisions.

We developed the Council's strategic approach to addressing the Climate Emergency, including the strategies:

- Climate Fife (2024)
- Zero Waste Fife (2018)
- Food4Fife (2024) and
- Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (2023).

These provide a strategic framework for a collaborative place-based approach, supporting decision making to achieve the Sustainable places principle.

The strategy, Climate Fife, includes the "Climate Place" project, a collaborative approach which both undertakes place-based analysis of climate risk and opportunities and supports communities to integrate climate action into their own place-based plans.

Through the Service's lead on [Local Heat Energy Efficiency Strategy \(LHEES\)](#) further consideration will be given to increasing co-ordination corporately on energy projects and opportunities to facilitate capacity for sustainable economic growth and move towards net zero. The LHEES has undertaken significant analysis that will inform the LDP and development control decision making in relation to energy and climate and will undertake further assessment to designate Heat Network Zones.

The Service has developed tools to support decision making for climate, notably the Fife Environmental Impact Assessment Tool. This will consider how climate impact assessments could support relevant committee reports to better inform decision-making, as well as informing decisions on the Capital Plan.

The Service provides Climate Literacy training to both internal Planning staff and across the Council, providing opportunity to consider sustainable places and support informed decision making.

## **Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, Evidence and Decision Making**

The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are known and been discussed with the Improvement Service and NHS Fife with a view to identifying how they can be used to evaluate the new LDP. It is too early to evidence their use in decision making ahead of work to align the LDP strategy with that of the [Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#) (LOIP) and developing a joint monitoring framework for the LOIP and LDP.

1. The LDP2 Evidence Report data gathering is place-based using four headings to explore issues and information available to address them in the new LDP:
2. How Fife will need to adapt because of the climate and biodiversity emergencies;
3. How past development has shaped how Fife is today;
4. The housing and infrastructure issues that need to be addressed within the lifetime of the Plan; and
5. How Fife's economy is performing and how resilient it is to the future?

These headings have been developed to align with the Council's five reform areas (tackling poverty and crisis prevention, leading economic recovery, community wealth building, addressing the climate emergency, and sustaining services through new ways of working), Recover and Renewal Strategy priorities (leading economic recovery, tackling poverty and preventing crisis, and addressing the climate emergency), and the National Planning Framework's spatial strategy to support the planning and delivery of sustainable places, liveable places, and productive places.

The Council through the Strategic Assessment of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) utilises the Place Standard tool and Place and Wellbeing outcomes. These are monitored corporately and evaluated as part of reviewing the delivery of the LOIP.

## **Tools and Approaches to Deliver**

Fife Council Communities & Neighbourhoods Services has used the Place Standard tool to gauge communities' impressions of the places they live, and these have informed the LDP Evidence Report. Planning services has also developed a Living Well Locally and 20-Minute Neighbourhoods [interactive mapping tool](#) (rather than 20-minute neighbourhood).

The site assessment methodology proposed for the new LDP is designed to assess strategy, policies, and proposals to ensure that the plan: is consistent with national plans, achieves strategic objectives, avoids harmful impacts and maximises potential positive outcomes, and is deliverable. The site assessment process will follow a four-stage process:

1. Stage 1 - High level assessment of sites
2. Stage 2A - Assessment against NPF4 policies
3. Stage 2B - Consider preferred use and capacity of potentially developable sites
4. Stage 3 - The detailed assessment in stage 3 will include viability assessment, strategic flood risk assessment, transport assessment, strategic environmental assessment, and Habitats Regulation Appraisal. At this stage, there will also be engagement with key stakeholders to understand the deliverability of sites.

### **Implications for LDP2**

The LDP2 Evidence Report identifies implications for LDP2 derived from an assessment of the evidence available. Section 12 in the Evidence Report compiles the issues and implications for the Proposed Local Development Plan identified from the evidence gathering stage including those related to:

- Tackling deprivation and social inequality in Fife
- The climate and biodiversity emergencies in Fife
- Evolving places
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Fife's economy
- Locality specific matters

## **Attribute 12: The Planning Authority Supports the Delivery of Consented Development**

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and they are concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements (MATHHLR) in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?
- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

### **Section 75 Agreements**

Fife Council Planning Services proactively manages Section 75 legal agreements and works collaboratively with Legal Services to secure timely agreements being issued. It is noted however that the time taken to issue legal agreements is also reliant on the applicant and their agents.

A planning officer manages the Section 75 agreements to ensure compliance and that the obligations set out in the agreements are delivered and where relevant, monies arising, are received.

Further work is currently being undertake in this area to help streamline, and where possible automate current processes for monitoring legal agreements and associated triggers.

### **Planning Conditions**

Planning conditions are only used where necessary and are reasonable and proportionate to achieve the necessary outcomes from the proposal. As far as practical the imposition of conditions is discussed with applicants. The context and justification of conditions are set out in reports of handling.

## Local Housing Land

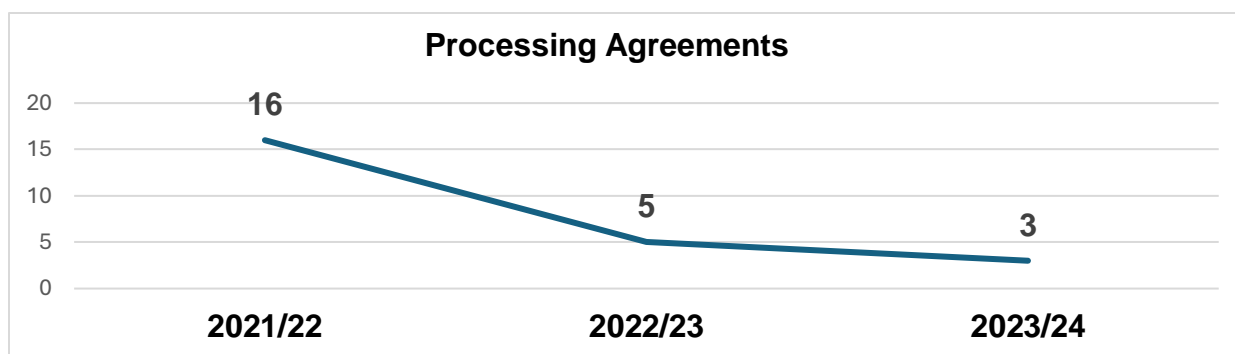
The local housing land requirement (LHLR) proposed for Fife's new Local Development Plan exceeds the MATHHLR in NPF4 and is stated in the LDP2 Evidence Report -

Area	NPF4	EvR
North	1,750	1,980
Central/South	5,550	7,450
All Fife	7,300	9,430

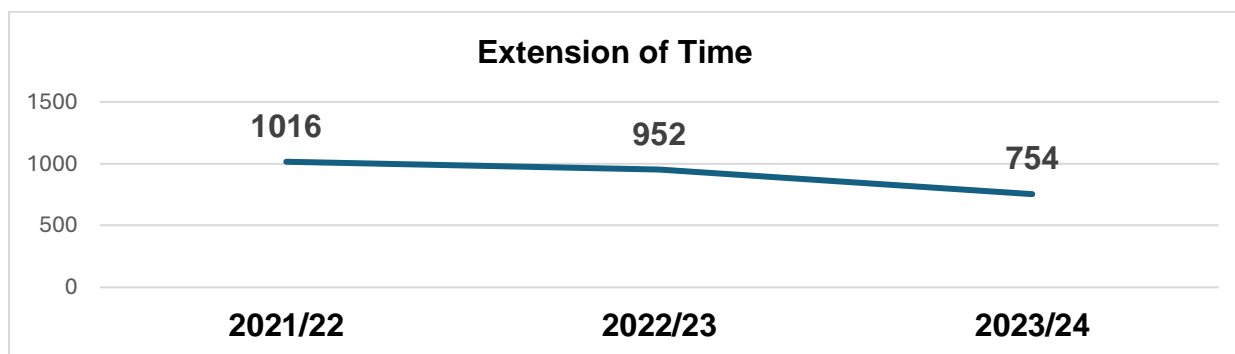
The Fife Council LHLR is a 29% increase on the NPF4 figure.

## Processing Agreements with Project Plan & Extension of Time

Number of Processing Agreements has decreased over the years.



Number of Extensions of Time has decreased over the years



## **Delivery of Development on the Ground**

The Fife Housing Land Audit is being adapted to become a housing delivery pipeline. The Scottish Government's housing land audit guidance will provide further advice when it is published as will its proposed guidance on delivery programmes. In the meantime, the housing land audit adaptation for a delivery pipeline will provide information to support house building and identify issues that block delivery and, where possible, how these can be overcome.

The Service works closely with major house builders/developers to understand key challenges which are preventing the delivery of new homes. Where possible, the Service seeks to facilitate the delivery of new development, particularly relating to Fife's strategic development areas and associated strategic transport and education infrastructure. The Service is open to considering a range of innovative approaches to unlocking development and work close with City Regional partners to learn and innovate. In Dunfermline, City Deal funding (Housing Infrastructure Fund) has been agreed with the Scottish Government to facilitate delivery of affordable homes by supporting an infrastructure first approach that unlocks the delivery of key significant strategic transport infrastructure.



## Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

(1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)

Attribute	Score
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2
12 This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2

Based on the grading above, the following areas of improvement have been identified. Their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short – 1 Year/ medium – 3 Years/ long term – 3+ Years).

Improvement Actions	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
Attribute 11:- Delivery of training and project work relating to the identification of how the planning service will meet the Wellbeing and Sustainability objectives set out in NPF4.	Planning Services	High	Short	Climate Change & Zero Waste Team
Attribute 12:- Regularly review new development schemes built on the ground and embed learning and training opportunities.	Planning Services	High	Short-medium	Development Management staff
Attribute 12:- Work with Legal Services and associated services to identify opportunities to streamline the Section 75 legal process.	Planning Services	High	Short	Major Business & Customer Service Team

## Summary of Improvement Actions

Attribute	Rating	Improvement	Priority
1	2	Working corporately to ensure that systems and processes are in place to reduce the impact of recruitment difficulties into specialist services who are critical to determining planning applications.	High
2	2	Develop and implement staff skills survey to identify transferable skills to meet aspirations and objectives of place-based agenda (NPF4)	High
3	1	Review and prioritise the actions identified in the existing Planning Services' Service Improvement Plan.	High
4	2	Developing a suite of e-learning modules for local elected members.	High
5	2	None	
6	2	None	
7	3	Developing spatial analysis further to inform decision making	Medium
7	2	Training for staff on the use of GIS	Medium
7	2	Horizon scanning of digital solutions which could enhance delivery of the planning service.	Medium
9	2	Continue to develop Planning Services' website to include more simplified guidance including video and visual demonstrations to help to reduce the number of invalid submissions.	High
9	2	New invalid process being scoped out through rapid process improvement event (LEAN) with agents to improve validation rates.	High
9	2	Continue to develop and improve upon the Planning timeline tool.	Medium
9	2	Further develop the Planning Services' customer survey to include selectable key areas (themes) where customers feel their experience fell short.	Medium
9	2	Training programme to be developed to improve on how staff communicate more effectively with customers.	Short

Attribute	Rating	Improvement	Priority
10	2	None	
11	2	Delivery of training and project work relating to the identification of how Planning Services will meet the Wellbeing and Sustainability objectives set out in NPF4.	High
12	2	Regularly review new development schemes built on the ground and embed learning and training opportunities.	High
12	2	Work with Legal Services and associated services to identify opportunities to streamline the Section 75 legal process.	High

## **NPIF Best Practices Case Studies**

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### **Case Study: Creating Pathways into the Planning Profession**

Attribute 2: The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce.

#### **Context**

Planning Services has created several routes into the planning profession in Fife by working the University of Dundee and Fife College. These routes include a mix of full and part time positions, the part time position which are aimed at students engaged in a course of study leading to a planning qualification. The Service has also entered into our third year of programme of internships with students from the University of Dundee gaining 30 hours of work experience.

#### **What happened**

Planning Services has been able to continue to develop its workforce strategy through the creation of these opportunities which is primarily aimed at creating opportunities for a younger workforce, to enable a streamline of planners into the earlier stages of their career. The Services budget is shaped to manage this continued and expected growth.

#### **Areas of collaboration**

**Key Officer:** Alan Blackie, Lead Officer

**Stakeholders:** University of Dundee, Fife College, Planning Service staff

#### **What was the overall result**

The graduate planner placements support individuals to gain the experience they need to become a chartered member of the RTPI. This is further supported by the Service's extensive CPD programme.

This area of work has also upskilled the Service's workforce in areas such as mentoring and coaching.

The Service was recently successful in obtaining an award at the Scottish Government's Scottish Planning Innovation Awards (SPIA)

#### **Lessons Learned**

The Service sees the value in continuing to develop its workforce and have done this successfully over several years. The Service is continuing to look at bringing other graduates in on work areas relating to its climate change activity.

## Case Study: Planning Application Timeline Tool

Attribute 3: This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement.

Attribute 7: This Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology.

Attribute 9: This Planning Authority has good customer care.

Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.

### Context

As part of Fife's continuous improvement work, the Planning Authority found that communication should be key within the Planning System. This does not always seem to be the case throughout the Service and by analysing customer feedback, Planning have identified there are some areas where communication could be improved. During the COVID pandemic and the inability to have a telephone service, this also impacted communication with customers. The Service collated all customer enquiries to find that the majority of these related to getting an update on their planning application. Combined with this, the Service found that most customers found initial communication was good during the validation process of an application, but contact was lost until an application proceeded towards a decision.

Using this data and with the help of digital technology, the Improvement Team in 2021 had an idea of using Power BI to create [a tool](#) which could be used by customers to show exactly where an application is within the Planning system. In addition, the Service could show what has been completed and what is still to be completed. This would help with communication but would enable customers to find out more information on their planning application without the need to contact the Planning Authority directly.

[Fife Council's online planning system](#) has limitations. Although this will show some progress of cases and has recently implemented a simple timeline before the Service could implement anything similar, it does not provide a complete picture. To assist customers and to give them an updated position on their application which can be used in conjunction with the online planning system, the Improvement Team started to map out the stages of an application. From an application that is received, whether it is invalid, any site visits, consultation dates, how the decision will be made (committee/delegated) and the report being started, to a recommendation and the final decision being made.

### What happened

At the time this project was scoped out the Service employed two Planning Improvement Technicians within the Planning Service. One of them has experience in computer programming and the other has extensive experience working within planning

dealing with complex applications for validation. Both members of staff have experience with dealing with customers daily. This together with customer feedback provided a good base to scope out what was required. During this project, the Improvement Team was expanded with another member of staff who had some planning experience but also some proven ability in using the systems within the Planning Authority. The Service has structured the team to include a Planning Improvement Officer who oversees all improvement projects and allocates work to two Planning Improvement Technicians. Using Power BI dataflows, the team were able to create a data warehouse to collate some of the Service's data from a case management system – Uniform. This allows the use of this data to create several visualisations and can be coded to provide different data fields and outputs.

Initially, the team had to create a baseline of the main stages of a planning application. As highlighted above, there are many stages that planning applications go through but using some of the fields in our case work system, it is possible to analyse where an application is within the planning process and what else is required to be completed before a decision can be made. By comparing these fields, each stage was scoped within the process as well as a text description which would also be displayed to the customer.

Using each of these stages, custom text was created to give customers details on their application when they enter either an application reference number or an application address using a custom-built user interface. As part of this, a graphical timeline which shows which stages have been completed and what stages have still to be completed as shown below:

## **Areas of collaboration**

The idea of this project came directly from within the Improvement Team. One of the staff had recently completed training in Power BI while analysing the many comments received from our customers who completed the Customer Survey and emails that were received through a central mailbox during the COVID pandemic. The idea was to provide customers more communication and as much information about their planning application as possible while adhering to Data Protection principles. Using Power BI previously for a new Weekly Update of Development Applications, invaluable feedback was received from a representative of Disabilities Fife regarding accessibility. A User Interface was designed with this knowledge and information in mind. The Tool is also due to be presented at the next Agents Forum to gather more feedback and how it can be improved. A link has also been included to acknowledgement letters for planning applications which are sent when every application is validated.

## What was the overall result

[The Timeline tool](#) was published in March and it is hoped that this will help to provide the Service's customers with more information about their planning application while reducing the need to contact the Service and Case Officers directly. The tool also includes a link so customers can contact Planning Services directly using an online form which is also used for customer enquiries. This allows the Service to collate all enquiries together but also to monitor its responses. In the next year, feedback will also be gathered on this while monitoring enquiries to quantify the effectiveness of this piece of work.

Using agile principles and as part of the Service's commitment to continuous improvements, the Improvement Team have already gathered some ideas to expand the Timeline Tool further and upgrade this function by including target dates, the monitoring of extensions of time, amendments received, draft and final sign off dates, and to add a feedback form so customers can also suggest improvements.

## Lessons Learned

The Planning Service in Fife invested in the workforce and identified an Improvement Team to be vital so that it is possible to deliver this type of project work. Although staff have knowledge of Planning, the Service has found it to be invaluable to have people that can expand the use of digital tools and systems to help within the Planning process. While Planning Services still relies on the Council's IT Service for some aspects of this, the Service has found that Planning staff who can combine their planning knowledge with various digital skills, are crucial to deliver improvements.

Although, this was identified early as an improvement, it took a bit of time to design and implement the project. It also involved working closely with colleagues within the IT Service to produce a working prototype that could be published online. At the time Planning Service's workload was high, and this project was delayed for various reasons. On reflection, this could have been completed sooner. Delaying the project meant the team had to keep going back to it and the complexity meant that some of the steps had to be duplicated.

Within this time, the software company that provides the online planning system, also delivered a timeline within their Public Access system. Although it is helpful, it does not show as many stages as the Planning Service's Timeline Tool can now display for our customers but there was a risk that this work might have become superfluous.

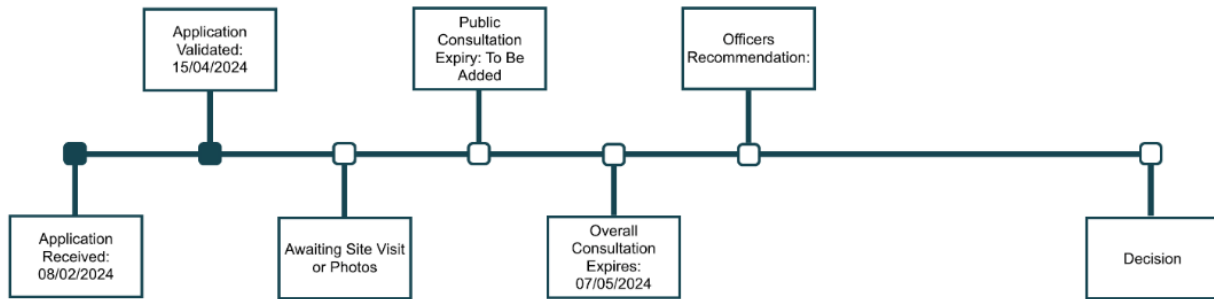
## Planning Application Timeline / Application Details

Application: 24/00321/PPP - Cupar North Cupar Fife

[View Application Details for 24/00321/PPP at planning.fife.gov.uk](#)

### Application Status

Your application has been allocated to Steve Iannarelli. You can track your application online by clicking the button above.





## Case Study: Working with and Learning from our Customers

Attribute 3: This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement

Attribute 7: This Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology

Attribute 9: This Planning Authority has good customer care

### Context

Analysis of customer survey feedback 01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 and comparison to the previous financial year.

### What happened

From the 1st of April 2023 to the 31st of March 2024 Fife Council Planning Service's Development Management team issued 2606 invitations to its customers, encouraging them to take part in the online survey. The survey includes 13 questions, encompassing a variety of formats including open-ended, multiple-choice, and equality monitoring queries. This approach allows the Service to continually improve its services based on the valuable insights provided by customers.

### Areas of collaboration

**Key Officer:** Steven Traynor, Planning Improvement Technician

**Stakeholders:** Applicants/Agents, Developers & Authority Other Staff

### What was the overall result



- ☐ 287 Surveys Completed
- ☐ 12% Return Rate
- ☐ 69% Completed by Agents

## Overall Customer Satisfaction 2023/24



When comparing the survey results from the previous financial year there is an increase in the number of satisfied customers and a decrease in the number of dissatisfied customers. As can be seen in the tables below representing each of the quantitative questions within the survey.

**Question - Setting aside whether you were happy with the final decision, please indicate how satisfied you were with the overall service you received**

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
40% Increase	22% Decrease	14% Decrease	32% Decrease	33% Decrease

**Question - How Satisfied were you that staff listened and responded to your needs**

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
25% Increase	13% Decrease	3% Decrease	29% Decrease	35% Decrease

**Question - How satisfied were you with the time taken to deal with your application**

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
43% Increase	16% Decrease	58% Decrease	6% Decrease	11% Increase

## Question - How satisfied were you with the updates on the progress of your application

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
52% Increase	22% Decrease	35% Decrease	38% Decrease	17% Increase

### What do the results tell the Service

The data shows that majority of customers have a positive experience when submitting a Planning application to Fife Council and that the Service has seen an improvement from the previous financial year, however, while the infographic paints a positive picture; customers are still highlighting the same issues as previous years suggesting that more work is required to improve in the following areas:

- Communication
- Clearer guidance
- Application processing timescales

### Communication

Many customers expressed a desire for better communication, including more updates throughout the planning process, faster responses, and the ability to speak directly with Planning Officers.

### Clearer guidance

Customers felt that samples of applications would help with determining what information to submit, while another suggested online video tutorials to assist with the submission process.

### Application processing times

Some customers highlighted that the process could be faster and more streamlined. Delays in validation and decision-making being the focus of these comments.

## Lessons Learned

The survey is well established and is effective in gathering feedback from customers of Planning Services to highlight key improvements that are required, but the survey needs to be improved upon by implementing ways for customers to select key themes where issues lie to allow better analysis of the data. The feedback shows that the Service is improving each year, and that excellent customer care is provided, but more work is needed to fully understand the issues that are impacting the customer's experience.

The specific actions and outcomes from the survey have helped to inform specific improvements for the year ahead and these are set out under the improvements related to Attribute 9.

## Case Study: Delivering Sustainable Living and Wellbeing

Attribute 11: This planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.

Attribute 12: This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development.

### Context

This site located at the edge of the small traditional fishing town of St Monans in the East Neuk of Fife was allocated in the Local Development Plan for residential development. As well as mainstream housing the development required the delivery of affordable housing and provision of an area for allotments. The provision of allotments within St Monans had been a community asset that had been much sought after for a considerable period of time by the local community.

The scheme includes the provision of multi-use paths to connect with the existing community and the provision of a SUDs basin, landscaping with additional tree planting and wildflower meadows.

The development integrates 40 affordable houses into the layout of 86 dwellings in a mix of sizes and styles of accommodation ranging from smaller single storey properties up to 4-bedroom family houses.

In addition to the allocation in the development plan, the provision of the affordable housing and the allotments were secured through the planning permission by means of a Section 75 legal agreement.

The negotiations with the developer and close working between Planning Services and the Community Projects Team of Fife Council resulted in the delivery of fully serviced allotments provided with a water supply and wide accessible footpaths. The Council and the community were then able to take forward the detailed layout and delivery of the allotments.

The allotments have been very popular with all plots taken up and there is now a waiting list. The overall development has provided a mixed tenure development which integrates well with the existing community and provides new opportunities for sustainable living both in terms of the allotments themselves but also the wider opportunities provided by a mix of affordable housing provided on the site.





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